

586 The day on which the woman is to come out of the hut, she is bathed
535 and anointed with an oil (mbon nzūi) and is seated on a stool placed in the middle of the village square. Other women sing and dance around her and give her a new name to represent a wish she has made.

There is no religious ceremony.

583 There also used to be a marriage by exchange of wives (mvole bunanga). With the mere consent of the women concerned, two men could exchange their wives. The parents of the wives did not interfere except to verify the amounts of the dowries and to make sure that the husband of the wife with the lesser dowry had fully paid the difference to the other.

543 The relations between married couples are simple: the man must
• 562 lodge his wife and clear the brush from the site where she will make her plantings; on the other hand, the wife owes absolute fidelity and obedience to her husband, who has the right to beat her. The woman has no authority in the household; she is hardly more respected than
B22 a domestic animal; she owns in her own right only the cooking utensils and the tools for planting and fishing, and does not have the right to own
B34 animals. Prohibition of sexual relations is rigidly observed during pregnancy, during lactation, and in the night preceding departure for the hunt, work at the forge, and various [other] tasks. If the prohibition were not observed, these tasks would be unsuccessful.

545 Polygamy is the present custom among the Fan. The first wife has authority over the others, who must obey her. She receives the largest share of everything and assigns household chores and field work. The husband sleeps with each of his wives for three days.

684 In adultery, only the wife is punished. She is beaten and her ac-
837 complice pays an indemnity to her husband. This indemnity amounts to a quarter of the dowry. The wife confesses her adultery only when forced to by a series of corporal punishments which range from blows to being tied to a tree full of ants (akokum).

586 Repudiation is accomplished without difficulty: the man sends back his wife and the dowry is repaid him. The causes for repudiation are repeated adultery, the death of a child as a result of adultery, laziness, practice of fetishism, and excessive surveillance of the husband; sterility is not a reason for [90] repudiation. The children stay with the husband, and the woman, once repudiated, may remarry.

612 belonging to the clan of the father or the mother (or belonging to a clan connected by marriage to either when the common origin is still known). We have already pointed out certain circumstances in which maternal kinship is effective. It should be remembered that this maternal kinship manifests itself from childhood on by obligating the mwanõ kal to visit his nya-nduma(s), that it is able to receive the right of guardianship, to collect the bride price, and to benefit from an inheritance (in addition to compensation normally provided at the time of a maternal nephew's death) by substituting for a vanished paternal kinship, and that it shares along with the relatives by marriage (abè) in the various phases of funeral ceremonies and mourning. This fact suggests that the power of the maternal kinship, while remaining subordinate, is recognized in this way to strengthen the power of "alliances" created by marriage. Those related to the father by marriage are the nya-nduma of his immediate descendants. In this way the bonds essential to the existence of traditional Fang society are consolidated.

Marriage and Alliances

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554 The first explorers, Du Chaillu and M. H. Kingsley, did not fail to point out the important role of relations set up by means of the numerous marriages among foreign groupings. Father Trilles, in his study made at the beginning of this century, also pointed out the personal advantages connected with a network [119] of alliances opened up through the interplay of marriages. He writes: "The Fang will therefore marry a girl in order to secure alliances in other tribes, to acquire greater influence by having more men attached to him by the ties of blood." (1) All researchers emphasize definitely

1. Father Trilles, "Proverbes, légendes et contes Fang [Fang Sayings, Legends and Tales]," Bulletin de la Société Neuchâteloise de Géographie, 1905, pp. 49-295.

two social consequences of marriage: the increase of personal prestige and the increase of the strength of the family group.

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554 These facts should be complemented by specifying the particular
● 562 value attributed by every Fang to the "possession" of several wives

581 and by recalling the keen competition for women this society. This
554 value was expressed in a colorful way by Dr. Cureau when he said:
562 "The gynaeceum is a bank, a savings bank. . . ." (2) And M. L. Mba,

2. Dr. A. Cureau, op. cit., p. 118.

a Fang of the Libreville region, in his Customier Pahouin (Pahouin Customs) gives a similar interpretation: the wife "is part of the property (or bisoun) of the group into which she enters by marriage."

[53] He completes this interpretation by saying that the adultery of a married woman "is severely punished because it is considered a theft." (3) The woman has no juridical personality: she has no

3. In the same vein, we cite a remark, quoted by Mgr. Martrou in a study dated 1918, made by a young Fang of Libreville to his wife: "What do you have to complain of, you are my beast . . . I paid a high enough price for you!"

personal property of any importance, merely goods for everyday use; she has no share in any inheritance; she is transmitted by inheritance, just as are various goods and valuables (which may be considered virtually as women). However, the woman is property of a special kind; she is property in the highest sense of the word: creative capital. [She is the] source of produce (by her agricultural function, all the more important now that the woman takes part in cultivating the rich plantations) and of service (by her various domestic functions). [She is the] source of power, by "the procreation of children contributing to the defense of the group or securing alliances," (4) and [she is the source] of personal prestige.

4. L. Mba, op. cit., p. 29.

[She is the] source of "alliances" and kinship; through her the number of people who exchange services and gifts and who can render aid and assistance is increased. Thus, marriage has a

[58] specific social meaning; it creates bonds (abè) which fasten together
 [58] the family and clan groupings. Curault points out that this imposes
 [562] a "close union, in spite of divergencies in language and in spite of
 the palavers of the different parts of the Pahouin people." At the
 same time, marriage [120] has a personal meaning. In traditional
 [554] Fang society the possession of many wives is the principal sign of
 wealth and the condition for all increase of wealth. This wealth
 conditions the importance of the social role; it makes possible the
 acquisition of a kind of personal power in a society with hardly any
 hierarchical system. (1)

1. Let us point out that two words
 with the same root, éval and évala,
 mean "polygamy" and "a prop, a
 support," respectively.

82 Because of this personal element the competition for women
 can become particularly keen. Very early, government reports
 pointed out the frequency of palavers due to the "women question,"
 and they continue to complain of them as being characteristic of
 "Fang society and psychology." Let us state at the outset that the
 competition does not concern the sexual services demanded from
 the woman. For the unmarried men there are various compensating
 possibilities -- but only in the line of "lustful sexuality," to quote
 the expression of R. Bastide. (2) The young unmarried people have

2. R. Bastide, Sociologie et Psychanalyse
 [Sociology and Psychoanalysis], Bib-
 liothèque de Sociologie Contemporaine,
 Paris, 1950.

complete sexual liberty among themselves: it is the custom called
azɔya-angɔn (azɔyya, fornication; ngɔn, maiden). E. Trezenem
 states in his monograph on the Fang of the Ogooué that "virginity
 of the woman is considered of no importance," that "the young
 girls are free to give themselves to whomever they want." Then
 he adds an "important restriction," saying that there are practically

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"Etudes sur le Pays Pahouin [Study
on the Pahouin Country], " op. cit.

"friendship wife"), show, as does the freedom just referred to, that the curbing of adultery can be explained by social reasons which are quite alien to sexuality.

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The possibility of raping women of neighboring people during the time of conquest, the possibility of buying foreign women at a good price, so long as the slave trade lasted, permitted the "chiefs" of groupings to remedy the dangers due to the unsatisfied desires of the young men. Apparently the Fang do not display, as do some people, (2) signs of unsatisfied sex due to the fact that

2. Cf. R. Bastide, Sociologie et
Psychanalyse [Sociology and
Psychoanalysis], pp. 160-161.

women remain the property of the older men. What is sought is the legal possession of the woman, let us say, for the many advantages it entails, rather than sexual possession. And in this sense the justification brought forward by L. Mba can be understood when he writes, "It was not material satisfaction of the senses which drove the Pahouins to polygamy, but many other reasons. . . ."

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When the marriage is consummated, the woman goes from a state of near liberty to one of strict sexual control. The specific painful physical penalties for adultery to which the woman alone is subject are particularly severe: being exposed naked before the assembled village, being tied to the ant tree, excision of the clitoris or pimento torture, various mutilations. When the woman, either by flight or by rape, leaves the grouping into which she married, the whole group reacts violently. It is the cause of fights, kidnaping, and pillaging of the village that has taken her

581 in. (3) There is the most absolute contrast between this control
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3. "Hence, conflicts that last for years, expressed through kidnaping of women and ending in gunshots,"
Libreville, Archives of 1909. And

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the saying: "If the woman is the receptacle in which all can quench their thirst, she should not be carried off."

between these collective sanctions, and the very broad morality which allows a girl to "celebrate her youth" and which appears in the proverb: "Woman is an ear of dry corn in which anyone with teeth may bite." Marriage strengthens the socialization of woman, imposing on her [122] unconditional submission. One might say, to quote R. Bastide, that it consists in passing from "lustful sexuality" to "social sexuality."

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The social character of marriage is emphasized symbolically. A series of ceremonies mark the admission of the woman into the group that is receiving her. The mother of her husband recites the latter's genealogy, and a segregation of a week is imposed on her, after which she undergoes a coming-out ritual -- she is bathed and anointed with oil by the oldest woman relative -- [55] and she receives a new name, indicating a wish, which the other women give to her at a time of song and dance. (1) The "alliance"

1. Cf. E. Trezenem, op. cit., p. 89.

concluded between the two family groupings is demonstrated by meals taken together and by rejoicing (*éyalô*), and above all, it is [76] consecrated by the sacrifice of an animal destined for the *biéri* (ancestors' altar) of the young girl's parents, showing that bonds exist not only with the group of living but also with the community of ancestors. (2) The emphasis is thus laid on taking possession of

2. No doubt it is necessary to link this sacred character of the alliance to the violence of collective reactions provoked by "women affairs."

the posterity (in this respect the recitation of the genealogy appears to be very significant) and on the creation of an alliance (the same

583 common, appears as the sign of exceptional success, which explains the prestige of the nkukuma who owns a greater number of wives and more property (bium). The price characteristic manifested now in the bride price is a recent transformation. Originally, its final payment sealed an alliance that could not be broken without a long process of "divorce"; one which survived even the man who enabled it to be, since the wife was transferred to the eldest son or the oldest brother; and one which, above all, legitimized the ownership of posterity: if the bride price was not paid in full, the newborn child belonged to the parents of the wife; if not fully paid back [126] at the time of a "divorce," the child belonged to the father. The fact that the bride price is not refunded at the death of the wife, when the latter leaves posterity, does not suggest that it is a matter of the price of the latter, but rather a reciprocity emphasizing that through the posterity the alliance has become a kinship.

• 542 We have thus endeavored to show the social importance of
584 marriage, pointing out particularly the fundamental role of the links it establishes between groups and the pre-eminence attached to controlling the circulation of the women and their bride prices. But obviously this system does not always function smoothly. A lack of equilibrium exists between the meaning it has for the grouping and the meaning it might have for the individuals concerned. Certain rules of procedure, recognized by custom, provide solutions for possible conflicts. The marriage agreed to by the young people may take place against the wish of the family heads following the rape (abdm) of the girl (1); the wife has various methods

1. Cf. E. Trezenem, op. cit., p. 88:

"The young man gives what he has in money and goods, and the parents are obliged to agree to the marriage by accepting this first payment."

of recourse against a seriously prejudicial union. Her complaint may result in her marriage to another of the sons of her father-in-law, or else she may go to a man of her choice who pays the

542 compensation, or she may "publicly curse her husband." (2)
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2. Cf. V. Largeau, op. cit., article:
Femme [Woman].

562 Finally, in the case of serious conflicts, the union may be dissolved
586 by "divorce," but the latter may only be used traditionally under
we -defined circumstances and "with the assent of the two interested
family heads." (3) There are therefore arrangements that allow

3. L. Mba, op. cit., p. 21.

personal reasons to be taken into account and which F. Meyé had
in mind when he said, "the Fang woman can in no way be compared
to a slave," because of the many kinds of recourse she has at her
disposal: these arrangements play a wholly exceptional role in
ancient Fang society. Beside the personal element, which also
acts as a disturbing element, is the fact that the number of unions
indicates wealth and social importance. (4) It results, when the

4. This element is shown particularly in
the custom reported by L. Mba: "In com-
fortably off families, the parents betroth
the boys before puberty and the girls after
puberty," op. cit., p. 14.

circulation of goods is no longer strictly controlled, in keen com-
petition and numerous disputes.

582 It is now essential to consider the persons concerned in the
635 play of marriage and to point out at once that certain persons (127)
are excluded from it. Apart from the double exogamy which
introduces a form of "fraternity" in a very broad sense of the word,
there are prohibitions concerning the precise degrees of relationship
as follows: between members of the tağa class (father, mother,
uncle, aunt) and the mwanō class (sons and daughters, nephews
and nieces); between members of the same segment, including
cousins to the third generation; there are prohibitions on those

made fifty years ago, such a whole represented from 350 to 700 or 800 persons -- while present-day villages rarely average more than 100 inhabitants. With peace restored, the grouping has relaxed and divided into its constituent elements which have broken away to form neighboring hamlets. A special word, ngbra, is the name given to these hamlets which are considered as still forming the same whole.

Linked with the virile character of Fang society is certainly [132] the accent on the separation of sexes as shown in daily life. For the woman, the living place is the hut; for the man it is essentially the "guardhouse." M. H. Kinsley writes: "The men spend most of their time in palaver houses built at each end of the street, while the women bring bowls of food the whole day long." (3) without being able to enter the abēñō, which is absolutely

3. Travels in West Africa, p. 1154.

forbidden them. H. Trillies defines this abēñō as the place "where the men assemble to deal with community affairs, war, marriage, lawsuits, etc. . . ." and where strangers are welcomed. In addition it is the place where the young men receive a large part of their education, where they learn, according to L. Mba, the most important interdicts (eki). Males of the same nd'è bōt assemble in the abēñō, which forms a virile grouping and one of kinship. In its midst the authority of the "eldest" is expressed. He is both the symbol and the regulator of the life of the group, and the intermediary between it and the ancestors. Here not only are important transactions regulated, but work is also organized. The life of each one is subject to the control and the nearly constant censure of all. In it is created a cohesion so that this group is the most resistant element of Fang society. It is through the medium of this group, that the traditional Fang is assessed, is isolated as an individual, by the foreigner; he is not known in the first place as X but as a man attached to the abēñō of Y. Such a grouping therefore represents a strong "community": the fusion, which favors effective kinship to the maximum (it is based on immediate filiation and "fraternity"), worship of the same ancestors, and joint

621 participation in the same tasks, tends - if one may venture the
 562 play on words - to the confusion of its members. On the other
 571 hand, the women it controls do not form such a coherent whole;
 they represent different clans, different modalities of kinship;
 they are the center of virtual conflicts (between female "relatives"
 and female "relations by marriage," between co-wives); except
 for the wives of the same man, who live together, they do not
 have a common living place.

621 The nd'è bôt - and, more precisely, this virile whole made
 571 up of relatives belonging to the same guardhouse (abēñō) - harbors,
 578 however, latent antagonisms, which are the result of the privilege
 614 linked with ancestry [133] or seniority. These tensions can come
 to a head when disputes arise usually from economic causes, such
 as circulation of wealth or of women, or allocation of farming land.
 They help to explain the variable size of the groupings con-
 sidered as villages, and the phenomena of aggregation and disinte-
 gration of the latter according to circumstances. But both of these
 movements are effected as a function of the minor lineage which
 is the nd'è bôt.

621 This grouping may by itself constitute a separate unit of about
 571 ten persons or a village with up to a hundred inhabitants. When a
 614 village is old, with a large population (200 to 300 persons or more),
 it cannot remain organized around a single common hearth. It is
 arranged around several centers corresponding to the sons of the
 founder or their successors. Thus the village of Ebiane (Yéngwí
 in the vicinity of Oyem) has 235 inhabitants distributed in three
 groups representing the respective posterity of three brothers. We
 have already stressed the fact that the heads of minor lineages are
 at the level of the same segment. The village of Afénane (Yébinvé
 of the Oyem region) with more than 300 inhabitants also consists
 of the posterity of three brothers, and each of the nd'è bôt occupies
 a definite position on the village street, according to the following
 diagram:



152 (symbolized by the expression "our women have become unruly"), and those connected with the change of typical relations between generations. There is no doubt that the morphological changes affecting the groupings - splintering, mobility of individuals, abnormal sex ratio - and the process of economic development have conditioned these phenomena. Nevertheless, it is equally true that specifically Fang internal conditions explain the acuteness of the resulting problems.

- 562 Oral tradition is significant on the traditional relations between the sexes. According to this, woman appears to be primarily regarded in terms of her fertility: "Go find your women and populate the earth," [148] says Nzame to the first man; (1) and in terms of

1. H. Trilles, "Proverbes, Légendes et Contes Fang [Fang Proverbs, Legends, and Tales], " Legend of the Nias, op. cit.

her usefulness: "Old woman, worn out calabash," asserts a proverb. She is shown to be subject to man ("I am nothing before a man, I am as stupid as a hen," says another proverb) and protected by him, who remains essentially "a warrior" in the ancient society. The few extant ethnographic studies have emphasized this lesser position. In his works dating from the beginning of the century, Father Trilles writes: "The girl is not considered as a "member" of the tribe." (2) E. Trezenem confirms this in a more recent account:

2. Father H. Trilles, Le totémisme chez les Fang [Totemism Among the Fang], note, p. 109.

The woman "is considered hardly more than a domestic animal..."(3)

3. Op. cit., p. 89.

At the same time, in an apparently contradictory manner, most of the early documents express surprise at the inordinate importance which seems to be placed on the woman, who is found at the source of numerous palavers. Let us add that the Fang woman was

562 this banana, and give half to my wife, after we have both drunk
 842 some water. Then I should go and embrace my wife. Then I
 159 should dip her (?) in water saying: who is this woman from whom
 you come?" Another text, given as a "dream," hardly deserves
 this name, or is only part of a richer dream (and it is still very
 revealing). It consists of a recipe for fecundity: "I dream that
 the devil recommends three herbs for a sterile woman, that she
 may bear a child...." The meaning is clear, all the more as
 various precepts collected under the title The Individual Will
 confirm it clearly. "I shall find means not to live any longer without
 leaving a child; what pursuits will permit a man not to die
 without leaving a child?; to choose oneself 'what is needed'
 to marry a woman who bears children (1)" One could call

1. Cahier de Daniel Ngema Ondo
 [Notebook of Daniel Ngéma Ondo].

it a regular "complex of the man without posterity." The search
 for numerous future descendants is still the most important under-
 taking. If the reasons for "power" just referred to have for the
 moment disappeared, others have been substituted or have ap-
 peared: the fear of breaking a line of descent, of being only a
 "deceased one" and not an ancestor (mvam) revered by his
 posterity, the fear of abandoned old age, and now the desire to
 enrich the family grouping, which is an economic unit, by having
 at one's disposal the greatest possible number of active elements.
 Elsewhere we have pointed out that the possession of a large group-
 ing is a guarantee of greater liberty because of the increased influ-
 ence it entails.

562 Besides being the instrument for reproduction — and hence
 subject [150] as soon as she is married to the most complete
 control — the woman is also the instrument of production. While
 the man builds the huts, clears the plantations, and (in the past)
 was essentially in charge of "defending the women and children,"
 (1)

1. In 1890, A. Fourneau observed
 in the Estuary region "long files of
 women loaded like mules" who

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brought supplies regularly to Gabon,
escorted by men with flintlock guns.

the woman is primarily a peasant. She ensures to a large extent the economy of subsistence, even taking part in hunting. With the arrival of colonization this aspect has taken on a new importance and a new direction. With the opening of increasingly more numerous markets and the established use of money, the products obtained by the woman have become a source of income, and the woman, as a worker, a source of profit. The woman became of great economic value and became, as one might say, doubly fertile. At the same time, her purely instrumental nature and her dependence became more marked. She tended to be truly an "object," all the more coveted since polygamy (in spite of the "freedom" allowed young unmarried people) makes of the woman a scarce "product". (2) The woman stands at the center of all

2. Cf. C. Levi-Strauss, Les Structures Élémentaires de la Parenté
[Elementary Structures of Kinship],
Paris, P.U.F., 1949.

competition at the same time that she remains the most dominated element of Fang society, because she is the one from whom most is demanded. It seems as if the woman were "separated" from the society of men, a stranger to the most organized and most active social body, and as if her impure nature is periodically asserted to better ensure her submission. This may all the better be explained because among the men the leveling tendency and the refusal to have slavery have not permitted the established existence of a relationship between one dominating and one dominated.

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This situation presents some ambiguity. The "mother" has relative authority over her sons and has at her disposal the weapon of calling down curses (yogô, to curse), by which she denies her "mother" quality. (3) In the same way, the first wife may curse

3. Cf. L. Mba, op. cit., p. 35,
the text of the "Curse."

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789 her husband. The "son-in-law" and the "mother-in-law" are
[606] bound together by a system of interdicts; the mwano are required
to show respect to the "generation of the mothers"; the pre-
eminence attached to seniority plays a role in the relations be-
tween the sexes. The woman may therefore be the object of re-
spect and the subject of fear. [151] On the other hand, "associa-
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795 tions" of women which have created a hierarchy, a teaching, a
ritual of initiation, and a whole body of distinguishing symbols
and signs and a technique shown by a specific dance, are referred
to in various documents, particularly the Mévangö (1), which is

1. Unpublished documents collected by
Abbot A. Walker, a native of Lower
Gabon and truly versed in local ethnology.

a Pahouin version of the Nyembé, a widely disseminated female
sect in Gabon. This sect was observed by Du Chaillu about 1860
among the Ba-kélé who were for the most part subdued by the
Fang. This observer wrote at that time that the Nyembé "pro-
tects the women from their male enemies, it avenges their grievances,
and serves them in all circumstances according to their whims." (2)

2. Father du Chaillu, op. cit.,
p. 322 ff.

This points out with great subtlety, to the essentially compensatory
role played by such a grouping. By participating in the "society
of women," the woman remedies the marginal situation and the
submission which are her share throughout her daily life. It imposes
or necessitates her collaboration in important moments for the
community and in domains which in principle are forbidden to her.

[535] Thus the dance of the Mévangö was used "long ago when a Pahouin
tribe was preparing to wage war against another tribe or to make
raids for women"; it was also used "at the time of preparation for
great elephant hunts." (3) Such "associations" no longer survive

3. Abbot A. Walker, notes inédites
[unpublished notes].

562 except in a sporadic and very degenerate form; we mention the
795 N'nup with a whole string of "queens" that has appeared in the
neighboring regions of Spanish Guinea.

562 This ambiguity in the position of woman to a certain extent
578 creates an equilibrium. On the other hand, from the point of
837 view of sentimental relations, this is not true. The man who ad-
mits that marriage should be regulated primarily in terms of social
considerations hopes to obtain some day a "favorite" wife and has
little fear of sanctions connected with adultery. The woman,
married young, remains prisoner of the system and is always
threatened with severe sanctions. Apparently this results in the
many disputes which were referred to by the first administrators.
"Very often the woman abandons her husband and returns to her
parents' village or follows a man of her choice..." (Archives
of Libreville, 1909). They were also referred to by the first
Fang scholars: "The Pahouin woman does not hesitate to leave
with a lover; often married against her wishes she avenges [152]
this state of things by a very great infidelity" (L. Mba, *op. cit.*).
The expression used by this author is significant. What might be
called the sentimental excuse permits a broader reaction respond-
ing to frustrations of another nature. We must see there the sign
of tensions which are actualized at the only possible level. Let us
add that the conditions created by colonization will liberate these
tensions to a great extent by destroying the equilibrium obtained
approximately by traditional means.

561 These tensions are not the only ones to be mended. Between
578 generations, that of the ésa and that of the mwanö, on the same
784 segment between the eldest and the younger brothers, it appears
that relationships of dependency can turn into antagonisms. Soon
[551] after his birth the young boy is "marked" by his ascendants, re-
ceiving a double name (essential in relation to other denominations)
which contains the name of an ancestor of his paternal line (of a
mvam) and the first term of his father's name. In addition to
individual interdicts imposed by his father, the child is subject to
various general interdicts which are removed by degrees as the child
becomes a man. Thus, there is the interdict on the pig (1), and on

1. The pig appears as a valuable animal

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754 judicial inquiry at Ambam in 1948 after a raid on ze mimfaka, an old chief who was a Protestant and an elder of his church declared, in so many words, that "the white man has weakened the ngil, and the beyem have taken it over; now it is the ngil of ngbwel /sorcery/."

[789] The initiates of the kôn or kun, a kind of magic that enables one to assume another person's strength without destroying his body, also seem to be grouped into a secret society with meetings every seven years.

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786 Beyem associations do not usually include both sexes; male and female sorcerers meet together only occasionally, for orgiastic sabbaths.

[789] The distinction between white and black magic is, nevertheless, difficult to draw the present time, and one can never tell offhand if the small groups springing up nearly everywhere to protect their members against bad luck by using, in addition to remnants of traditional rites, recipes copied from magic manuals printed in France, belong to the one or the other.

[562] To come back to the traditional associations, we must underline /the fact that/ in them there was a complete separation of the sexes, to such an extent that women were often forbidden to speak the name of a men's society or to show any kind of knowledge, even superficial, of its rites. The prohibition was less stringent for men with regard to women's rites, since the nsem, the breaking of a taboo, was for them punished by physical incapacity or illness rather than by death. /66/

A women's rite like mevungu had both a village aspect, on account of its geographical framework, the jurisdiction of its huts, and an interclan aspect as a result of exogamy. Much less is known of these women's rites than of the men's, for the very good reason that men are not allowed to know anything about them. Missionaries have condemned mevungu as obscene: I have heard that initiates who have gone through the menopause are supposed to play a male role in dances miming coition, without being able to obtain the slightest proof or the least detail (1). What is certain is that this is a rite of

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1. A woman "chosen for her large vagina" presided, seated with legs spread apart. Each initiate would go tickle her and pull the clitoris. (J. B.)

[831]

fecundity, of fertility, and also of the hunt: an unlucky hunter may have his wife initiated so as to ward off bad luck.

7. The Position of Women(1)

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1. J. Binet, "Condition des femmes /The Position of Women/, " Cahiers internationaux de sociologie, 20, 1956, Presses Universitaires de France, and "Statut des femmes dans le Sud-Cameroun /Status of Women in the Southern Cameroons/, " to appear in Recueils de la Société Jean Bodin, 1956, Edit. of the Librarie Encyclopédique, Brussels.

If the older people are to be believed, the position of women according to orthodox custom was that of minors. However, there is nothing in traditional theory that justifies such a negative attitude towards women: some clans name women among their eponymous heroes, and there are legends attributing to the creator god (Zambé) a daughter in whose honor certain rites were performed. At the present time the tribal societies making an effort to revive the old clans and to revise their codes of manners and their customary laws always keep a place for women at the core of the executive /état-major/, but very often the role of women is secondary: they are dancers, singers, organizers of dances, or stewards watching over followers—in short they only carry out men's orders. Women are also sometimes associated with men in religious /confessional/ societies (Protestant or, more frequently, Catholic), but mostly they form separate groups, formerly so-called secret societies, today Christian devotional confraternities, which enable women to meet together, to set up a hierarchy and have leaders of their own. Women do not actually participate in the life of the community /cité/ or, better, they form a community among themselves, distinct from that of men.

In law women seem to be at a disadvantage, but it is not clear that they owe this to genuine antifeminism. In fact, no one is perfectly free in customary law; only the patriarchal head of a family [315] possesses full legal capacity. Marriage does not confer majority on a woman, and a girl possesses greater independence than does a married woman. In the sexual sphere this is clear: illegitimate [348] births involve no disgrace; a child is always welcome. If born before marriage, it belongs to the mother's family. And it is not unusual for respectable fathers to wait until a daughter has borne children before MARRYING her off.

52 children before marrying her off. In the economic sphere a young unmarried woman may freely undertake all sorts of commercial enterprises, whereas a married woman would need her husband's consent. Nor do divorce or widowhood, /82/ any more than marriage, emancipate a woman in theory. Escaping from her husband's guardianship, she falls back under the authority of the head of her family, but from the point of view of custom this is not a detrimental situation, since every person remains subject to his father.

459 Therefore the liberty women possess in managing their inheritance ought not to appear an anomaly. Besides, individual savings are widespread in Africa. And the division of property into masculine and feminine allows women and girls to own objects which neither husbands nor fathers may take from them. A partition of goods is the logical consequence of these assumptions.

422 Women theoretically have the right to dispose of the product of their labor—their harvest—but they must provide the basic foodstuffs. Only the surplus is sold, but in the majority of families when large sales take place the proceeds are divided between husband and wife. Women usually control the proceeds of day-to-day sales in a market or to passing travelers: petty amounts comprising only 10 percent of the total family budget. They may invest these profits by joining a tontine (a society in which each person makes a contribution on a fixed date and of which the capital is allotted to each member in turn).

Thus the traditional means for growing rich are limited. But changing customs are allowing women to follow various occupations that will make them independent. Women engaged in trade or dressmaking, for which they pay a license, business trade employees or saleswomen, theoretically have to be authorized by their husbands, who may decide how the earnings are to be spent. In actual fact women seem to be free agents. Even in the customary courts they appear alone, unaccompanied by fathers or husbands.

423 52 In the sphere of land tenure the trend is the same: women are acquiring a certain amount of property. With stabilization /i.e. settling down/, the growth of collective rights over cleared land or land good for tillage is quite understandable. The idea of allowing a personal right to a woman who is not truly a member of a family, but merely loaned to it, seems an aberration. This, nevertheless, is the situation among the Ewondo, where a divorced woman

423 continues to have rights over her old garden plots and may gather the
● 532 harvest from them. Among the Bané and the Boulou the position of divorced women is not the same, but the tendency is so, for when fallow land is cleared, every woman goes back to the plots she used to work four or five years before, and sons may demand plots that have been cultivated by their mothers.

Cacao plantations raise other problems. A man concerned for his children's future may turn over a plantation to a wife or encourage her to make one for their son. In other cases childless women start
[593] plantations as a means of providing for old age. Women with children do not have to fear, for their children will look after them. Finally, there is an even more important /83/ change appearing: a matrimonial system of community of property is developing. When a woman has collaborated with her husband to set up a plantation, she has the right upon his death to keep the usufruct. Even if her son inherits the plantation and sells the produce, it is she who collects the proceeds. This is an important development, because it is evidence of a kind of equality between spouses who are keen and efficient in harvesting the produce of the same piece of land. It furthermore shows that the
[542] household is a legal reality vis-à-vis the two individuals, on the one hand, the patriarchal family, on the other. (J. B.)

Chapter 6

Principal Elements of Culture

1. Physical and Mental Characteristics

a. Anthropological Data

141 The first travelers describe the Fang as very tall, well built, and with a formidable appearance. This opinion certainly contained a good deal of subjective evaluation, because the figures given, for instance by I. Dugast, some of which are cited below, indicate simply an above-average height:

784 religion. For several years, exogamic taboos have even been observed
787 to take on new life with a strictness that runs counter to canonical ideas
about marriage (cf. above, p. 63).

g. Sorcery and Magic at the Present Time

177 Even in the areas longest converted to Christianity, contemporary
789 Pahouin continue to believe in magic and sorcery, which is, moreover,
797 not contrary to the teaching of the Scriptures. Mbibian compete with
European or African bedökita, mingengani compete with exorcists,
mvimvi'i with the police, and so on. Once in a while beyem still
kill in order to feed their évu, and I knew a kôn practitioner who tried
to make use of his skill so as to win an election.

However, since the coming of the Europeans, magic and sorcery
have developed in the direction of a syncretism that is sometimes
baroque. Ecclesiastical schisms do not bring about a complete return
to ancient practices, but a sort of grafting of what remains onto a
Christian stem, to which is often added a facile /à bon marché/
esotericism borrowed from mages and fakirs of metropolitan France.
Talismans, perfumes guaranteed to inspire love, and magical jewelry
arrive by the hundredweight in each mail from France. Initiations
that had died out are being revived in the form of parodies of the
Mass or of ordination, or even of hazings often obscene. What was
most valuable in the native pharmacopoeia is being more and more
neglected in favor of modern preparations used at random, with only
the magical aspect surviving, emptied of its old meaning and there-
fore of its functional character.

Admittedly, Christianity has "caught on" in the country, just as
European medicine has—the question is, just how deeply. In any
event it is certain that old practices, overthrown as they may have
been, survive nonetheless in new forms, fluid and changing and still
far from stabilized. The result is a continual uneasiness, a crisis in
adaptation, of which the outcome is unpredictable.

Leaving aside any religious or ideological position, /124/ it does,
however, seem possible to say as of now that one of the most revolu-
tionary contributions of the missions has been to make women par-
ticipate in the same religious cult as men.

535 rite, and event in life, of which the orchestral element as well as the dance movements and costumes had a very precise symbolical meaning. Many of these dances have died out, either because they have lost their raison d'être (as with war and initiation dances, etc.) or because they have been prohibited by the administration and especially by the missions as obscene or pagan (fertility, funeral, medical dances, etc.). Those that survive have now a recreational or purely artistic character, which was only secondary before. It is significant that the number of dances in which both sexes take part has considerably increased and that nearly all are now open to the public and may be seen by spectators of any age or sex.

In spite of this falling off, there is still a large number and variety of dances. Among the most widespread may be mentioned:

534 Âzila, an old fertility dance, especially among the Fang and Ndomou; an orchestra of vertical drums, mbae and ngom, with "spoken" accompaniment of the drum-telephone, nkul; it is danced by professionals (women initiates of mevungu?) with bare torso, vegetable rattles at the ankles, unsewn wildcat skin skirts, wooden masks on the left arm; the leading dancer, ôsua njem, inserts a horn into her vagina during the dance; the dancers apparently drug themselves with a decoction containing (notably) Indian hemp; the missions have forbidden this dance, and this has provoked several incidents.

276 menjan, called thus because the dance is accompanied by an orchestra of balafos; it is widespread except, perhaps, among the Boulou; it is performed by the young girls and little girls of a village; each village has its own tune and special costume consisting of a belt of raffia fiber, skirt and cap in "pastry-cook" style in the village colors, with a brassiere worn in Christian villages.

535 177 ényenge, sometimes called njeman fulutita, a Protestant dance (it must have been inspired by Swedish gymnastics used by a German-American M. P. A. / American Presbyterian mission? / missionary to provide a substitute for "immoral" dances; si non è vero...), found especially among the Boulou but extending into northern Gabon under the aegis of the Movement for Regrouping Pahouin; it is a dance performed by young women and girls with a male leader, nlebe njeman, who conducts with a whistle; an orchestra of drums, nkul, mbae, and ngom, rattles

754 the leaders who will be there, as each has his private mark.
575 That's all."

828 "But why are some pointed and others not?"

203 "Oh, that! No, that's a deep secret. If I were to tell
you that I'd be punished by death at the next meeting."

[Pages 454-462 omitted. --Translator] [463]

[Two paragraphs omitted. --Translator]

791 All practitioners' societies recognize ritual sacrifice. In
754 many cases a human victim is slain and eaten. These sacrifices
575 are often characterized by what seems to us revolting cruelty and
782 horror. I shall have occasion to deal with this point more fully
266 when discussing sacrifice.

These are ritual sacrifices: immolation is not done for the
pleasure of killing any more than consuming the victim is for the
pleasure of eating human flesh. This is so much the case that a
woman is never sacrificed: "Munga ké dzamadzam, ké kie ve
1562 nsissim: A woman is of no importance (from the sacrificial point
1747 of view)," runs a Fan proverb, "She has no power over spirits
because she has no soul."

At sorcerer's feasts, on the contrary, and in the societies
they organize, men are eaten for the pleasure of eating human
flesh.

754 According to all the Fan and all Africans, sorcerers leave
their boeies in order to go and feed on the hearts of other men
while asleep. Hence their name, béndzi bur, eaters of men.
Sometimes they do this themselves, sometimes it is done by a
spirit that possesses them. I willingly admit, of course, that there
is nothing true in these accusations, at least as regards the way in
which the sorcerers work. But one thing is undeniable, the fact
of cannibalism.

[One paragraph omitted; p. 464 omitted. --Editor]

Chapter XIV

Totems of Sorcerers and of their Secret Societies

The Nagual and Nagualism

[Summary omitted.--Translator] [466]

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575 that of his nagual and vice versa. If he is ill or if he dies, his nagual suffers or dies; if the nagual dies or suffers, so the man dies or suffers.

[Pp. 474-480 omitted. --Translator] [481]

Initiation of the Practitioner

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791 The practitioner at the time of his initiation undergoes a different kind of test from that which young [ordinarily] men do. These tests are distinguished by a more marked degree of cruelty and especially by the offering of a victim. The victim will first be dedicated in special rites. After the tests and when the neophyte has been judged fit to enter the priestly company, then only is the totem chosen. But the choice is not left to the candidate; the "admitting" practitioner gives it to him. He must first of all undergo a severe fast of at least seven days. During this time he is forbidden absolutely, under any pretext, to leave his hut, which is set apart in a portion of the forest reserved to practitioners and called eli bengan. No person is allowed to approach. Any intercourse with women, even a mere glance, would bring about permanent exclusion. Moreover, the woman would be put to death, and her father or husband would have no right to compensation, pecuniary or other.

During the neophyte's seclusion his "admitting" [practitioner] has chosen the totem; avoiding many complications, he almost always chooses the class totem to which the confraternity is already dedicated.

What kind of totems are they? They never belong to the mineral realm, nor are they ever celestial phenomena, nor spirits of any sort, materialized or not, as happens with clan or tribal totems.

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825 The class totem is usually a bird [or] a swiftly moving animal, rarely a fierce one when the choice would be made because of the animal's positive qualities and not for its power to harm. Indeed the secret society prefers to seek as protecting totems, those that will guarantee swift and sure retreat in case

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of danger. Hence the symbolic choice of fast birds: the river swallow, the koulyèbe that flies like an arrow, the eagle or the vulture whose powerful flight protects it from enemies, the turtledove or the wood pigeon that knows how to conceal a nest so as to escape all attention. Or it might be an antelope with nimble legs and acute hearing, [482] which is especially difficult to capture. Finally, the crocodile sometimes appears as a totem not because it is bad tempered and devours men, but because it is always on the watch and at the slightest disturbance submerges itself and disappears in the river or because its scaly covering makes it invulnerable to arrows and javelins.

Such are the qualities that a secret society demands for itself.

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The "consecrator" has chosen the totem, generally that of a class. He must now procure one himself but catch it "alive." He brings it into the hut of the "consecrated" one, who keeps it, at least as much as possible, on his chest throughout a whole night. In the morning the totem is led with great ceremony to the middle of a clearing and sprinkled with lustral water: the attending practitioners dance around it, then sing the hymn to the totem; the candidate sings it along with them. This hymn extols the totem's strength, valor, and swiftness, and especially thanks it for the protection given the society. Then, after this hymn, the candidate fetches the victim, whom he must offer, and leads him before the totem. Ordinarily, the victim is a foreign slave, because he should not belong to the Fan nation, in order to avoid any possible ritual offense. (1) It is, however, permissible --

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1. A foreign slave or a woman is chosen because neither possesses a totem and therefore no ritual offense is to be feared.

[278]

and this often happens -- to take a Fan woman. The slave or woman is tightly gagged. Usually no resistance is offered, especially since the victim is given aléwané to drink the evening before, a decoction of herbs and woody mushrooms that have the property of suppressing memory. The neophyte forces the victim to walk in front of him, or pushes him, going around the totem

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for administering an effective emetic along with the test poison. I shall evaluate these ordeals later when discussing religion.

potion.

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Women are not subject to the tests I have just mentioned except sometimes to the nkai test. Among the Fan they do not drink the test poison; they are, in fact, considered as irresponsible and in a state of tutelage. Therefore in cases of serious accusation, a woman's father or husband has to take her place but does not invoke the totem, because it would not be able to act on her behalf since it does not acknowledge the woman.

Only for an accusation of sorcery does a woman have to submit to a test.

[278] She is brought gagged to the middle of the village, two female relatives pull her head back, and the practitioner empties into her eye the sap of a euphorbia called ka. (2) If she comes

2. Euphorbia scandens, of the arboreal euphorbias.

[266] through unhurt, she is innocent. If, on the contrary, as nearly always happens, the eye leaves the socket, she is immediately declared guilty, dragged away into the forest, burnt, and eaten. The accusation frequently arises, and punishment is never delayed.

VIII. Blood Exchange

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" 'Brotherhood' (in America, totemisation)," says Mgr. Le Roy, (3) "is relationship through an exchange of blood; if

3. La religion des primitifs [The Religion of Primitive Peoples] op. cit., p. 120.

this is not quite totemism, it is very near to it."

597 sacking of a village. For, although in such cases all the men
127 and able-bodied youths are ruthlessly killed and eaten, this
does not apply to women and children, even to male children,
who henceforth belong to the new tribe and will later be looked
upon as warriors. There is no ceremony for women or female
• [562] children, since, as we have seen, the totem ignores them,
and they have only one duty toward it, to hide in their huts as
quickly as possible whenever there is talk of the totem, and
never to mention it. Should this nevertheless happen, it would
be an offense requiring expiation.

597 Male children are adopted by the various heads of a family.
Tribal or village chiefs have first choice, the rest of the
warriors come after. The one or more children chosen by a
chief, however, may never succeed him.

597 Adoption ceremonies are like those at birth. The adopted
304 child loses all his old totems in order to acquire those of the
tribe he joins. There is just one additional ceremony, blood-
letting. So as to prove his definitive entry into the tribe, he
undergoes the following operation when led before the totem.
With the mfor knife, a small steel blade kept for this purpose,
the adoptive father makes a few slight scarifications on the child's
left arm, collects the blood that flows, and throws it on the
ancestral skulls, then on the akaméyón. He then takes a frag-
ment of skull and some totemic sacrificial ashes and rubs these
vigorously on the child's arm. This is the true sign of adoption,
by which the boy definitively enters his new family and is
recognized as belonging to it entirely. Later on he may even
be allowed to take a wife from his former tribe, in spite of the
strict law of exogamy, because adoption is so authentic.

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563] Often the same bloodletting and blood alliance occur
with illegitimate children or with mulattoes, but the object is
then different. Adoption never takes place at birth but much
later, so as to ensure for the child the ancestors' protection.

The same act often occurs when a child is ill. [573]

3. Marriage

119 I do not know of any truly totemic act among the com-
 562 plicated religious rites connected with marriage. This absence
 583 must come from the fact that women are considered to be in
 themselves independent of the totem.

584 Before marriage, especially before starting to make the
 719 rounds of the villages in order to pick out a future companion,
 a young man first builds a sort of triumphal arch in front of
 his hut. A creeper decorated with various bits of cheap finery,
 fabric, green leaves, flowering branches, and ava flowers, is
 stretched from his house to the one opposite, on the other side
 of the public square or the main street of the village. Before
 his hut two shrubs garnished in similar fashion have their tops
 bound together to form a triumphal arch. The young man
 opens the biéri box, removes his family totem and a skull and
 puts them before the statue of the biéri. Then for hours, end-
 less songs and dances will be performed. When the young man
 is exhausted, one of his friends takes over. The songs and
 dances last far into the night and start again at dawn. No one
 may interrupt or even enter the hut, otherwise the entire cere-
 mony would have to be begun all over again. A woman's
 glance at the biéri or totem, or that of a strange man, would
 be enough to bring this about. Therefore, one of the young
 man's friends is constantly on guard to prevent such an accident;
 he stands in front of the hut door and sees to it that people move
 along briskly.

[583] This rite only takes place when a youth is contemplating
 marriage by abduction. He wishes in this manner to gain the
 good will of the biéri, the ancestors, and the totem.

On the third day in the evening the ritual dances end.
 [782] The young man immediately offers a final sacrifice, usually
 of a cock, a hen, and some maize, following the prescribed
 forms. Then, since he is not permitted to rest for even a
 moment, he starts out, carrying the cock, hen, and maize as
 his only provisions; he is not allowed to take along anything
 else.

142 bread-winners and some are strong and muscular, while many more are weak and worn out from ceaseless toil.

The Fang make good carriers, and will do a splendid day's journey even in the wet season with bad forest trails, if not overloaded. A carrier's load should never exceed 25 kilogrammes; and 20 would pay better on a long journey. The first day out with a caravan the men usually drag along slowly, until their loads settle well down in the *kingi* and fit their backs. The *kingi* is a very ingenious contrivance for carrying a load in; it is usually made from a forest vine with a plaited head strap. To hurry carriers the first day is a bad mistake; poorly adjusted loads chafe and cause sore backs, and before night the whole caravan is tired out and sulky. It is a wise traveller in Africa as elsewhere who knows how to save his men.

A very noticeable fact among the Fang is the scarcity of old men. I attribute this largely to the ravages of syphilis; the same terrible disease that has done so much towards the degeneration of numerous coast tribes, and which is already playing fearful havoc among the Fang. Indolent, untrustworthy and warlike, they are nevertheless a most companionable people. The slightest piece of drollery or a joke immediately causes laughter. It has been my privilege to visit many foreign lands including China, Japan and Korea, yet never in my life have I met such an absolutely good-natured, fun-loving people as the Fang.

The men are not fond of work. They frequently ask me for something to do to "earn a cloth." If I tell them to cut fence poles or good clean bark in the forest, they decline. A male Fang's idea of work is to sit in the *Abeng* (= palaver house) and make fish lines by rolling pineapple fibre along the upper portion of his thigh, or to manufacture *Abi* (roof thatch). At these occupations he can converse with all comers, hear the news and take his part in talking a palaver. They are a revengeful people and will keep up a palaver over a woman for many years. If they do not succeed in shooting a man during a palaver they do not hesitate to fire at and kill a woman, while captives held as hostages are often treated with great cruelty.

The women regard virtue very lightly. Before marriage a girl can do nearly as she pleases. It is absolutely safe to state that it would be almost impossible to find a maiden in a Fang village over sixteen years of age. Adultery is common, and one of the chief causes of "women palavers." Women rank first in value as goods for trade, next in value are goats, then guns and cloth. The greed for goods has a strong hold on the people. They learn quickly but have very little originality. They have no obscene rites. Their habits are very dirty; they will wash in a small pool of water and, while bathing, fill the gourds or imported jugs with the water in which they are washing and use it for domestic purposes. In many other ways they are absolutely filthy, and descend to the level of brute creation. They are not over-burdened with modesty, both sexes frequently bathe together in a perfectly nude condition. A male Fang passes a large percentage of his time in

fifteen) take their flint-lock muskets, heavily loaded with trade powder and handful of broken iron pot (iron trade pots) or small stones, and creep up close to the town after dark. Two men try to enter the town unobserved; if they succeed, then they knock at the door of a hut and say, "We are strangers travelling; give us fire and food." Directly a person inside the house opens the door, both men discharge their guns into the house, and immediately run for the bush toward their comrades. The whole town is soon in pursuit, and unless careful they run into an ambushade prepared for them. A fight may occur, but more often the attacking party return to their town in triumph, shouting: "We are real men, we are real men, we have been to town, we have shot a man (or woman), we are men—real men." There is great rejoicing in their town, and a dance follows. If the palaver is a serious one, the town is often stockaded with split logs placed vertically in the ground; huts are likewise stockaded. Poisoned bamboo spikes are buried in the forest paths to wound the feet of an enemy. The weapons used and relied on to-day are flint-lock muskets. Spears are rapidly falling into disuse. The cross-bow is only used for shooting birds and small bush cats. It is a mistaken idea that the arrows used with the cross-bow are poisoned. Shields are not used. The chief causes of war are disputes over women, hence called "women palavers," and these feuds may last for years. Prisoners are often permitted to starve to death, and are occasionally killed and eaten. Owing to a bitter feud it is often impossible for the women to work in the gardens or fish on the river, the consequence being a great scarcity of food. In Foulabifong, where I resided, a woman palaver lasted over ten months, and the three adjoining towns were in a state of famine. A prisoner was nearly starved to death, and I had to repeatedly plead for him. During these feuds many women are shot while walking the paths. The Fang think it quite correct to shoot a woman; they say, "It is always safe to shoot a woman because she cannot shoot back." Prisoners are frequently exchanged, others are held as hostages.

Abal (war). Translation.

If people are going to war they go in crowds. If they approach near the town (of the enemy) they hold a council. An old man (one) he says thus: We will go to fire when? Then the others say, We will go in the night. Then they stay (sit) there until night. Darkness comes, and they light a torch. Then two or three people go to the town, and the other people remain in the bush. If the people who went to the town find people sleeping, then they point their guns inside a house and fire. Then people die. Then they go back running to meet the other people. Then they all gather in one place and return singing to their own town. Then they beat the drum and rejoice. Then the people who remained in the town say: Tell us the news as you went. Then they tell the news. Then the headman sits down and tells all the people in town that a person must not go anywhere alone. Then all the people hear, and all sit down (remain around their town to await events).